ECE Highlights

UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE No. 34 January 1999

## Éditorial

### *À propos de la crise russe et de ses conséquences : responsabilités*

*Au début de 1998, la CEE-ONU, à contre-courant de l'opinion générale, affirmait que l'on n'avait pas encore subi toutes les conséquences de la crise asiatique et rappelait les conditions à remplir pour que se consolide l'amorce de reprise en Russie. L'année a passé avec son cortège de crises. Dans les deux derniers mois, institutions et gouvernements ont revu leurs prévisions pour 1999 en baisse. Le chômage ne diminuera sans doute pas à l'Ouest et les réformes seront plus douloureuses, voire ralenties en Europe centrale et orientale.*

*Très liées au rythme des réformes et aux conditions de départ, les disparités entre pays de la région continueront donc de s'aggraver, augmentant les risques de division entre une Europe qui s'intègre progressivement autour de l'Union européenne et une autre qui aura l'impression d'être laissée pour compte.*

*Malgré tout, en ce début de l'année 1999, il est des raisons d'espérer.*

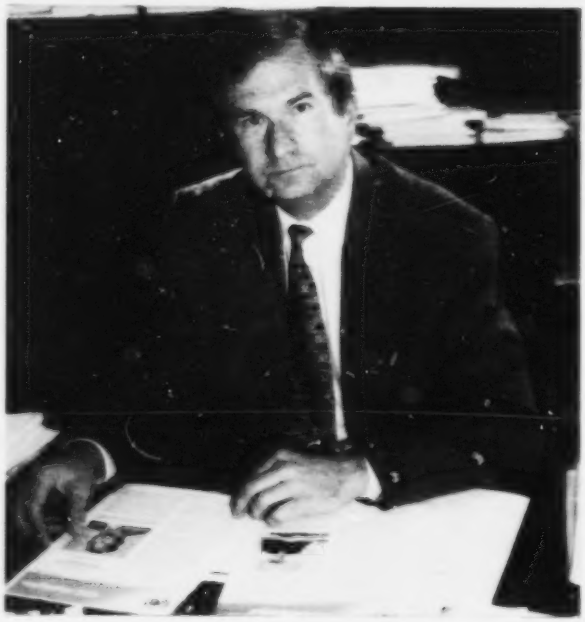
*Face aux crises dans nombre de pays engagés dans de profondes réformes, une raison d'espérer est l'apparition du doute vis-à-vis de la pensée unique des dix dernières années. On redécouvre le rôle de l'État, les vertus des institutions et des règles fermement appliquées. On reconnaît l'importance d'un bon enchaînement des réformes institutionnelles, des privatisations et des libéralisations. En un mot, on découvre pour les pays à économies en transition ce*

*(Suite à la p. 2.)*

**(For the English translation, see p. 12.)**

## *Interview with*

## Ambassador Miroslav Somol of the Czech Republic



Ambassador Miroslav Somol of the Czech Republic was designated by the Commission as its new Chairperson in conformity with Rule 15 of its Rules of Procedures after Ambassador Eveline Herfkens relinquished her responsibilities as Chairperson of the Commission following her recent appointment as Minister for Development Cooperation of the Netherlands.

**ECE Highlights:** ***You have just been designated as the new Chairperson of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN/ECE). How long have you known about the ECE?***

*Ambassador Miroslav Somol*: I have had working contact with the ECE for a long time. In the 1980s I was responsible for multilateral trade issues in the former Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Trade. Although my work concentrated on UNCTAD matters, I nevertheless had much contact with ECE through our small depart-

ment dealing with international economic organizations. Therefore, I have been familiar with the Commission's problems since the beginning of the 1980s.

***What would you like to achieve as Chairperson of the Commission?***

I consider this job as a very important one requiring the dedication of a great part of my working time here in Geneva. It is important for me to continue the dynamic efforts initiated by my predecessor Ambassador Herfkens. My role will be to foster dialogue between the secretariat, the Commission's Bureau and its member States in order to assist smoothly and effectively the implementation of the Plan of Action of the Commission and to identify possible emerging problems with a view to solving them. The selection of current topics for the Commission's Spring seminars is but one example where such a dialogue is essential. In addition, I intend to be in close contact with the Chairpersons of ECE's various committees in order to ensure interaction between the activities of these Principal Subsidiary Bodies (PSB) and the Bureau, which for instance is very important for the discussion on prioritization.

***What do you think will be the future role of the regional commissions?***

I believe that all of the United Nations regional commissions have a role to play in the future within the United Nations system. However, each commission's role will differ in accordance with the priorities and problems of their respective regions. I certainly have no fear for the future of the ECE as it undertakes very concrete technical and normative work. The work undertaken by ECE's PSB is very much appreciated. What is important in the years to come for ECE is to continue to strengthen its cooperation and maximize synergies with other United Nations agencies, international organizations and institutions.

***The Czech Republic is a candidate for membership in the European Union. Is it still relevant for it to participate in ECE?***

The ECE and the European Union are two completely different organizations. The ECE is a pan-European United Nations body having specific tasks, reflecting the wide interests of all European countries. The European Union on the other hand is a highly developed integration body of an economic and political nature composed principally of countries from western, southern and northern Europe with a few associated countries in transition. However, there are fields where these two bodies cooperate and complement each other, for example regarding transport regulations and environmental issues. Active participation in the work of the ECE is a daily reality for many Czech Ministers and institutions, while at the same time negotiations for EU membership are underway. In the future we plan to work in parallel with both organizations.

***Is your country a country in transition?***

Yes, I consider it to still be a country in transition. Much more work remains to be done and we know what path to follow. However, this is a process which will take time. Within a few years we hope to be a member of the EU and by then we have to improve and develop the Czech Republic's economic structure, legislative framework and performance. After that it might take a few or perhaps many years before we achieve the goal of entering the stage of a really highly developed market economy country.

***The Czech Republic is one of the big "success stories" of the transition to a market economy. Do you consider it to be in the same group or league as other countries in transition?***

First of all I would like to be very cautious about the notion of the Czech Republic as the miracle country of the transition. We have tried and done our best and now we know that in the initial stage we had quite good success and dynamism in the development of our economy. During this initial stage we launched a rapid and extensive privatization process, put inflation under control and had very low unemployment in comparison to our neighbouring transition countries. What I think one of the main elements of this success was the very dynamic development of a service sector and its networks. But in the mid-90s this dynamism slowed down and economic problems began to emerge. We have identified what these shortcomings were and the last two governments have taken various measures to tackle these problems with a view to renewing vigorous economic growth and development for our society. That means, among other things, that we must finalize the privatization process, continue the process of restructuring industry and fight actively growing unemployment. Consequently, we don't consider ourselves as exceptional or exempt from the group of transition countries. One must realize that the region of eastern and central Europe is composed of countries with very different economic levels and political situations. From the geographical point of view, I have no problem in considering the Czech Republic as part of this group of countries. The transition to a market

*(Suite de la p. 1.)*

### *À propos de la crise russe et de ses conséquences : responsabilités*

*qu'écrivait déjà la CEE dans l'*Étude sur la situation économique de l'Europe en 1989.

*Face aux risques de division en Europe, une raison d'espérer est le dialogue qui se poursuit dans les trois institutions paneuropéennes que sont le Conseil de l'Europe, l'OSCE et la CEE-ONU et les actions complémentaires et concrètes qu'elles développent. Puissent-elles être pleinement utilisées.*

Le Secrétaire exécutif,
Commission économique pour l'Europe



Yves BERTHELOT

economy is hard and demanding. Both patience and efforts are required from institutions and citizens.

***How does the Czech Republic deal for instance with the problem of pensions in the context of the latest developments?***

This is a very difficult issue and the discussion of it is going on in my country. The discussion centres on a substantial change in the system, especially from the point of view of extending the retirement age. Even I was personally surprised that in such a relatively short time—since the transition process began—the life expectancy has increased substantially in our country. I personally don't know exactly what factors are behind this development, perhaps the better quality of life and improved environment? In the future we will have a much larger proportion of retired persons in comparison with the present situation. The crucial economic question will be how the active population will be able to cover the needs of the retired in the long run. As I said before, the new Government is now giving great attention to the discussion of this matter.

***One of your colleagues was Chairman of ECOSOC and he became a Minister. A former Chairman of ECE also became a Minister. Are you going to become a Minister?***

No. Until now and in the near future I have no political ambitions in my country. I am a career diplomat working in multilateral diplomacy with a practical economic background. As I mentioned before I spent my entire career from the university days working in the Foreign Trade Ministry and the Ministry of Industry and Trade on multilateral trade issues. Consequently, I am more inclined to continue along these professional lines rather than to take up politics. But in the long run you never know. ❑

# "ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE"

## Fourth Ministerial Conference

Aarhus, Denmark, 23-25 June 1998

Environment Ministers and high-level experts throughout the UN/ECE region gathered together for the fourth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" in the Danish city of Aarhus from 23-25 June 1998. On the agenda was the discussion of pan-European environmental cooperation and assessment of the progress made since the previous meeting in the Bulgarian capital, Sofia, some three years ago.

### *Message from the United Nations Secretary-General*

At the opening session a message from the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, was delivered on his behalf by Mr. Yves Berthelot, Executive Secretary of the UN/ECE.

The Secretary-General expressed his satisfaction that the "Environment for Europe" process had developed into such an impressive framework for dialogue and collaboration and for setting important examples for other regions of the world.

He was especially heartened by the innovative approach taken in opening up environmental decision-making to the general public. In his view the new ECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters constitutes a milestone in increasing transparency and participatory possibilities in the environmental arena. It will help put an end to environmental secrecy. It will promote democracy and protect the right of everyone to live in a healthy environment.

He pointed to the strong involvement of non-governmental organizations in the preparation of the Convention as another noteworthy and commendable feature of the agreement. It was his hope that as many governments as possible in the ECE region and beyond

would take the necessary steps to accede to this valuable new international legal instrument. He observed that the Convention is one among several signs of progress along the road from the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro six years ago. Major conventions on climate change, biodiversity and desertification had entered into force; global efforts towards truly sustainable development. But the UN must go further in order to reach the critical mass need for long-term impact.

He noted that the ECE region had a significant responsibility in this regard as it is the region which has most polluted our planet, but which at the same time has made the greatest efforts to protect the environment through institutional measures, technological progress and other steps.

### *New convention on environmental rights*

As a result of the previous "Environment for Europe" Conference, UN/ECE has negotiated a regional Convention on Environmental Rights to Guarantee Access to Environmental Information, Public Participation in Environmental Decision-making, and Access to Justice in order to protect the right of everyone to live in a healthy environment. On the occasion of the fourth Ministerial Conference the new, wide-ranging Convention spells out the public authorities' duties towards the public at large and covers such areas as water, air, soil, chemicals, human health, land-use planning, genetically modified organisms, etc. Its provisions lay down specific requirements in terms of openness and transparency, so setting an example for strengthening democracy throughout the UN/ECE region and beyond. Its adoption by 35 countries and the European Community at Aarhus was one of the highlights of the Conference.

The involvement of NGOs in the negotiations has been without precedent. At the Aarhus Conference itself NGOs, organized a half-day session on public participation. The keynote address was delivered by Ms. Mary Robinson, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

### *Combatting air pollution*

On the occasion of the "Environment for Europe" Conference, the Parties to the UN/ECE Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution also held a special session at ministerial level at which 32 countries and the European Community adopted and signed two new protocols to the Convention: one on heavy metals, the other on persistent organic pollutants or POPs. ❑

**The UN/ECE in your daily life**

*All involved for a Better Environment*

## New Sulphur Protocol enters into force

A new Protocol to the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution came into force on 5 August 1998. The Protocol on Further Reduction of Sulphur Emissions is the sixth in a series of specific international agreements negotiated within the framework of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN/ECE) to combat air pollution. The Protocol was initially signed by 28 countries, and has so far been ratified by 18 of them—Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and the European Community—more than the 16 required for it to come into effect.

The Protocol on Further Reduction of Sulphur Emissions adopts a novel approach in that it sets individual emission ceilings and reduction targets for each Party. These ceilings and targets are based on the environment's vulnerability, which differs from country to country. The aim is to find the most cost-effective solutions for reducing the "exceedances"—when the actual acidic deposition exceeds the capacity of the environment to absorb it—throughout the UN/ECE region. To meet their targets, the Parties will take measures to increase energy efficiency and promote the use of renewable energy. They will also reduce the sulphur content of some fuels and use best available technology at stationary sources. Strict emissions limit values will apply to large stationary combustion plants.

The Executive Body for the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution is negotiating an additional multi-pollutant protocol on acidification, eutrophication and photo-chemical pollution, focusing on emissions of $NO_x$, ammonia and volatile organic compounds (VOCs). It will be based on the same effect-oriented approach as the Protocol on Further Reduction of Sulphur Emissions. It is expected that these negotiations will be completed next year and that the new protocol will lead to further significant improvements in our environment. ❑

# UN/ECE News Digest

## New Deputy Executive Secretary joins ECE

Mrs. Danuta Huebner, a national of Poland, has been appointed Deputy Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe with effect from 2 November 1998. Prior to joining ECE Mrs. Huebner has held a number of key positions in the Government most notably, as Under-Secretary of State in the Ministry of Industry and Trade, in charge of, *inter alia*, relations with international organizations and integration with the European Union; as State Secretary for European Integration and, most recently, as the Minister, head of the President's office. Mrs. Huebner obtained a Doctorate in economics from the Warsaw School of Economics where she is now a professor of economics, but currently on leave. Throughout her career she has been engaged in extensive teaching and research including research under a Fullbright grant at the University of Berkeley in the United States.

Her publications include numerous articles and books on national and international economic issues.

Mrs. Huebner replaces Mrs. Dunja Pastizzi-Ferencic who retired last year. ❑

## Unique partnership established between governments and private enterprises to enforce intellectual property rights

*International Forum on the Enforcement of Intellectual Property Rights in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, Geneva, 26-27 October 1998*

Industrial counterfeiting and piracy cost billions of dollars to countries throughout the world. For countries in central and eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, this has meant enormous losses in revenue and investment, and is seriously undermining their fledgling market economies. To address the issue and discuss concrete ways of protecting intellectual property rights (IPRs) in these countries, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN/ECE), in conjunction with the European Union, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), held an international Forum in Geneva on 26 and 27 October. Attending the Forum were over 250 participants from Governments, private companies, law firms, international organizations and various institutions concerned with developing,

protecting and enforcing intellectual property rights in the central and eastern European region.

The discussions focused on the economic and social implications of the current lack of protection for intellectual property rights owing to poor enforcement. Also highlighted was the value that improved enforcement could offer to local enterprises. Among the most important implications for the countries concerned are significant investment losses, job losses, tax evasion, the involvement of organized crime and terrorist groups, and health and safety hazards for the population. For local, newly privatized enterprises, protected and enforced intellectual property rights would improve their access to funding and new technology, and provide them with an adequate return for higher value added production and more research and development.

To tackle this problem of protection and enforcement, the Forum recommended that:

- group of experts be created, under the joint auspices of UN/ECE and WIPO, to develop a constructive dialogue between the private sector and individual Governments and to implement the recommendations of the Forum within the region.

Other practical and concrete recommendations adopted at the Forum included the following:

- Increasing the role played by the private sector in enforcing and protecting intellectual property rights;
- Encouraging domestic companies to make use of their intellectual property rights by providing guidance on, for example, developing their own brands, filing for patents or registering trademarks; and
- Improving the coordination of intellectual property rights issues at national level, by creating National Intellectual Property Units, special task forces or other such bodies.

The recommendations of the Forum are designed to build trust and confidence between Governments and the business community, and increase cooperation with the private sector. The aim is to achieve a higher quality of trade and investment in the transition economies of central and eastern Europe through a more secure environment for the protection of intellectual property rights. ❑

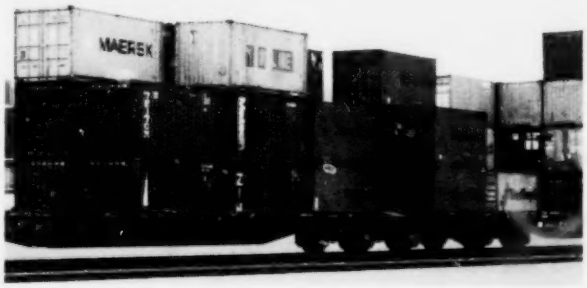
## More container transport on inland waterways in Europe

*Bulgaria signs an international agreement to develop container transport on inland waterways in Europe*

On 28 October 1998 the Minister of Transport of Bulgaria, Mr. Wilhelm Krauss, signed the Protocol on combined transport on inland waterways to the European Agreement on Important International Combined Transport Lines and Related Installations (AGTC) of 1991. With its signature, Bulgaria became the thirteenth ECE member country which signed the Protocol.

The objectives of the Protocol, prepared by a group of experts working under the auspices of the UN/ECE, are to emphasize the importance European Governments accord to the development of combined transport services on European inland waterways and coastal routes with a view to reducing the environmental impact of transport sector. The Protocol will also provide a multilateral legal framework for promoting the use of combined transport techniques (containers, swap-bodies, semi-trailers, trucks) on European inland waterways and coastal routes. It will enhance international coordination and cooperation in planning and setting of priorities for the development of a coherent European combined transport system and infrastructures using the extensive European inland waterways network and coastal routes as well as related ports.

In order to achieve these objectives, the Protocol to the AGTC Agreement determines all important European inland waterways, canals and coastal routes that are suitable for the use of combined transport operations. The




Protocol identifies all important terminals in European ports that are suitable for the use of combined transport services on inland waterways. It also determines and prescribes, as international standards, technical and operational minimum requirements that must be fulfilled by the European inland waterway network and its port terminals in order to allow for efficient international combined transport.

The Protocol has been signed by 13 States. It will enter into force after 5 States have ratified it. Three States (Czech Republic, Denmark and Switzerland) have ratified it so far. ❑

## Climate changes strategy for Energy Efficiency: UN/ECE networking links new partners as response

*Energy Efficiency 2000 Steering Committee Promotes WebSite, Investments and Standards to Assist in Preparations for UNFCCC Kyoto Protocol*

An advanced electronic communications network on the Internet has been established for the Energy Efficiency 2000 Project which will link eastern and western partners from the government, finance and business sectors to provide the information flows needed to enhance trade and technical cooperation. The EE2000 WebSite currently provides a Forum for over 200 eastern and western partners, a Library of technical and financial information and Search Engines to explore the World Wide Web for business and research partners. A new distance learning function is being developed to enable central and eastern European experts to develop business plans for energy efficiency investment projects to help cut the environmental pollution causing climate change.

These are some of the features of the www.ee2000.net WebSite presented to the largest annual session of the Energy Efficiency 2000 Steering Committee held since the Project began in 1991. The session was attended by over 70 experts from 31 ECE member States in eastern and western Europe, North America and the CIS as well as experts from the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), European Commission SAVE Programme, International Energy Agency (IEA/OECD), World Energy Council (WEC), International Vienna Council (IVC) and the Russian Energy Efficiency Demonstration Zones Association (RUSDEM). Delegations also discussed the implementation of the UNFCCC Kyoto Protocol, the Energy Conservation Initiative, a joint European Commission-UN/ECE project on energy efficiency standards SACHA, capacity building and financing energy efficiency investment projects. ❑

www.ee2000.net

## UN/ECE Committee on Sustainable Energy — Annual Meeting

The Committee on Sustainable Energy met in Geneva for a three day session in October that substantively reinforced the work of this key UN/ECE Principal Subsidiary Body of the Commission which covers the areas of sustainable energy, energy efficiency and gas as well as on coal and thermal power and electricity interconnections.

ECE Executive Secretary, Mr. Yves Berthelot, highlighted the key issues that were taken up by the Committee:

- The opening and liberalization of energy markets;
- The energy sector's potential response to climate change in the light of the Kyoto Protocol of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; and
- The need to focus attention on improving energy conservation and efficiency. ❑

## The Kyoto Round Table: On the Eve of the Buenos Aires Conference

The Kyoto Protocol to the Framework Convention of Climate Change was the focus of a Round Table organized by the Committee. The timing of this Round Table was particularly appropriate for two reasons. It occurred just one month before the crucial Fourth Conference of Parties of the Climate Convention to be held in Buenos Aires. Equally important, the stakeholders—energy industries in particular—had a voice at the Round Table in expressing their views on how the issues relating to the Kyoto Protocol might be dealt with. These issues include emissions trading among developed countries and both among developed countries and between developed and developing countries, joint implementation and the "Clean Development Mechanism", aimed at fostering greenhouse gas reduction projects carried out between partner countries. ❑

## Southeast Europe takes new initiative to boost trade

### *New impetus for regional cooperation*

An association of national trade facilitation committees, SECIPRO, was inaugurated in mid-September in Sofia, Bulgaria, by eight member countries of the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI). This association of PRO committees was formed by SECI members Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Romania, Slovenia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey. Albania was unable to attend but it sent a message endorsing the new association and confirming that it would participate in the future.

Among the main aims of the new association is to improve border crossing in the region to eliminate costly delays that restrain the development of trade and discourage foreign investment. Specific activities of the association will include harmonizing use of the European Union's Single Administrative Document so that it can serve as a common declaration for trade among SECI countries. SECIPRO will also act as a resource to national Ministries of Trade in the region on trade facilitation issues addressed by the World Trade Organization. SECIPRO looks forward to cooperating with other trade facilitation associations, such as EUROPRO, as well as promoting bilateral contacts between PRO committees in the SECI region and those in other trading-partner countries. The association will use the Internet extensively to improve information exchange among the individual PRO committees, thus minimizing communications and travel costs. Additional details will be provided shortly via the SECI Web site (http://www.unece.org/seci/). ❑

## UN/ECE: A regional outpost of the United Nations

http://www.unece.org

Questioning the relevance of the United Nations' regional commissions is a thing of the past: they have just received a renewed commitment from Member States, which have formally recognized their role and place within the United Nations. This commitment was made on 27 July 1998 and delivered by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which has reviewed the activities of the regional commissions. The major assets and functions of the regional commissions are highlighted in the ECOSOC resolution which was adopted on that date in conclusion of the review.

ECOSOC considered that one of the major roles of regional commissions is to be the United Nations outposts in their respective parts of the world, thus offering an important forum for articulating regional perspectives on global issues. At the same time, ECOSOC also recognized their important role in building consensus within their regions as the regional commissions are fully part of their regional institutional landscape. It was felt that this capacity should be more widely used by UN bodies, funds and programmes. An important role is also the involvement of regional commissions in the preparation for and follow-up to major UN conferences. In the UN/ECE this has been demonstrated for the Rio Conference on Environment and Development, the Cairo Conference on Population and the Beijing Conference on Women. Furthermore, ECOSOC welcomed the effort of reform undertaken and achieved by the regional commissions. Particular reference was made to the UN/ECE. ❑

## Spotlight on UN/ECE Publications

### Third issue of the 1998 Economic Survey of Europe
### *The Russian Crisis*

The third issue of the *Economic Survey of Europe* published by the UN/ECE provides in its chapter 1 an overview of economic developments in 1998 and discusses at length the policy implications of the Russian crisis.

Chapter 2 discusses the economic situation in more detail in the western market economies and in the transition economies of eastern Europe, the Baltic States, and the CIS. Particular attention is given to an analysis of the origins and unfolding of the Russian crisis and its impact on other transition economies.

Chapter 3 reviews international trade developments in eastern Europe, the Baltic and the CIS; and chapter 4 looks at the development of current account balances and their financing, especially in the wake of the Asian and Russian crises.

Chapter 5 examines the attempts to create a system of Production Sharing Agreements in Russia which, in their

promise and relative failure, illustrate at a micro-level many of the problems which have held back the reform of the Russian economy. Finally, the Survey contains a Statistical Appendix containing long time-series for the principal macroeconomic variables in the ECE member countries. These tables, as well as those in the text, reflect revisions and updates by national statistical offices made available to the ECE as of mid-November 1998.

The 1998 volume of the *Survey* is the fifty-first in the series of reports prepared by the secretariat of the UN/ECE. Until now the *Economic Survey of Europe* has been an annual publication, as was the Economic Bulletin for Europe, a second publication which focused on trade and payments issues. These two publications have now been replaced with an annual *Survey* of three issues starting in 1998. The present issue is the third of the 1998 volume. ❑

## The UN/ECE in the age of change

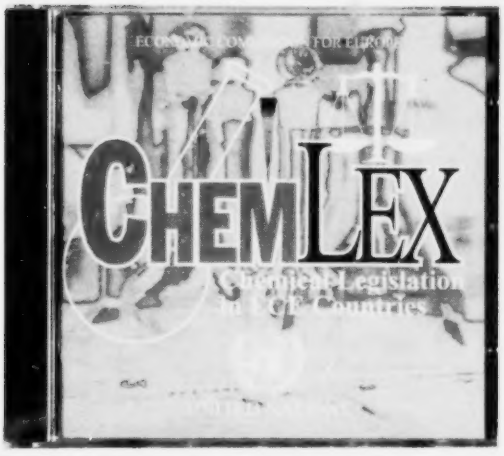
ECE's original contribution to a changing world is highlighted in this work published to commemorate the Commission's fiftieth anniversary. It retraces the history of the UN/ECE since its creation a half century ago. It offers a broad and dynamic overview of the major geo-political, economic and institutional changes having taken place during this time and defines the unique niche ECE has established in the institutional landscape of the region. It also reflects upon the Commission's present position and future prospects. Its author is Dusan Sidjanski, Honorary Professor in the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences and Professor at the European Institute of the University of Geneva.

It is the integration of the continent that serves as the guiding principle of this book: integration within the two cold war blocs; integration of the multipolar Europe of today; the integration of this Europe in the world. It is also this same word "integration" that best sums up the action of the UN/ECE: unfailingly, the UN/ECE has built bridges between the different parts of Europe, as much through its studies, which provide a better understanding of each other's economic policies and difficulties, as through its conventions, norms and standards, all instruments of integration and harmonization.

*The Economic Commission for Europe in the age of change*, E/ECE/1357, GE.97.40095. This publication is available in English and French. The Russian version will be issued shortly. ❑

## Chemical Legislation from 25 countries made transparent

### *UN/ECE launches comprehensive database on CD-ROM*




The UN/ECE has just launched a database on chemical legislation from 25 countries on CD-ROM. The database covers 15 sectors of the chemical industry, including asbestos, fertilizers, materials in contact with foodstuffs, transport of dangerous chemicals, and labelling. Over 600 text summaries are given, with complete reference to the original acts. The database is searchable by country, keyword, act reference and date. Acts are chained as well (so amendments to an act can be found with the act itself). Summaries and titles are generally provided in the original language, as well as in English.

The database, which also includes European Community directives, is intended to provide useful information and guidelines for countries worldwide that still have little or no chemical legislation. It will also give manufacturing companies, trading companies, legislators and lawyers instant access to information that is normally difficult to obtain. It should also appeal to institutes studying industrial development, trade and investment possibilities. The research was undertaken with assistance from the European Commission.

Priced at US$ 250, the CD-ROM may be ordered through the normal United Nations publications sales agencies or direct from the United Nations sales offices in New York or Geneva. Please quote ISBN number 92-1-100776-3 or sales number GV.E.98.0.17. ❑

# The Marketplace for certified forest products—Retailers set the tone

The general purpose of certification is the improvement and documentation of forest management practices. Certification schemes exist or are being developed in a number of countries in North America and Europe. Currently, products from a scheme developed by the Forest Stewardship Council, an international, non-governmental organization, are visible in several European marketplaces.

What is a "certified forest product"? It is a forest product bearing a certificate which demonstrates, in a verifiable manner, that it comes from a forest which is managed sustainably. Certification is a way in which consumers and retailers can check the suppliers of goods. It is a means for good forest managers to promote their products. However defining what exactly is meant by "sustainably managed", and setting up fair and credible systems to verify that a product is in fact produced sustainably, poses many problems and has been the cause of much tension in the forest sector, at all levels. A special chapter in this year's *Timber Bulletin* "Forest Products Annual Market Review" from the UN/ECE Timber Committee outlines the current state of the marketplace for certified forest products.

*Timber Bulletin* "Forest Products Annual Market Review", ISSN 0259 4323, US$ 20.00, annual subscription US$ 95.00 or US$ 130 for airmail delivery. ❑

# East, West, home's best

## *UN/ECE assesses the housing sector in Poland*

In Poland, investment in housing is sharply down. Housing starts, for instance, dropped from 150,000 in 1989 to 59,000 in 1996, as the State is no longer involved in new housing construction, but neither the local authorities nor the private sector have taken up the slack. In 1980, the Polish construction industry built six new homes for every 1000 inhabitants; by 1996 that figure had dwindled to 1.5 (see table). These are some of the findings just published by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN/ECE) in *Country Profiles on the Housing Sector, Poland* (Sales No. E.98.II.E.7) the second in a series of country reports which examine the trends in the housing sector in countries in transition.

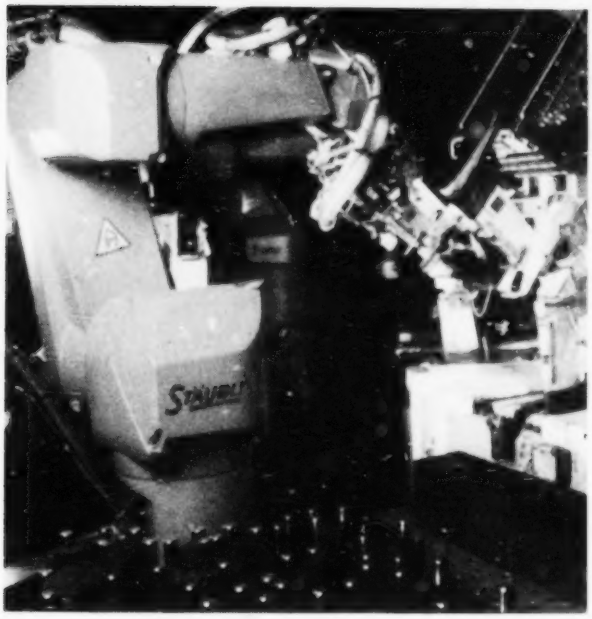
The UN/ECE report points to the lack of efficient financing instruments and the inability of the municipalities to handle their new responsibilities for the provision of housing as the main causes of the stagnation in the housing sector. The quality of the existing housing stock is also a problem. Poland's housing stock is relatively new—40 per cent was built after 1970—but in poor physical condition. It is estimated that some 800,000 units should be demolished and that another 500,000 to 600,000 need major renovation. The UN/ECE report warns that, unless Poland addresses the stagnation in the housing sector, its housing shortage will worsen and labour mobility will be constrained. Despite these warnings, there have been many positive developments, too. Housing has again moved up the political agenda and Poland is putting in place a new legal framework for housing development. ❑

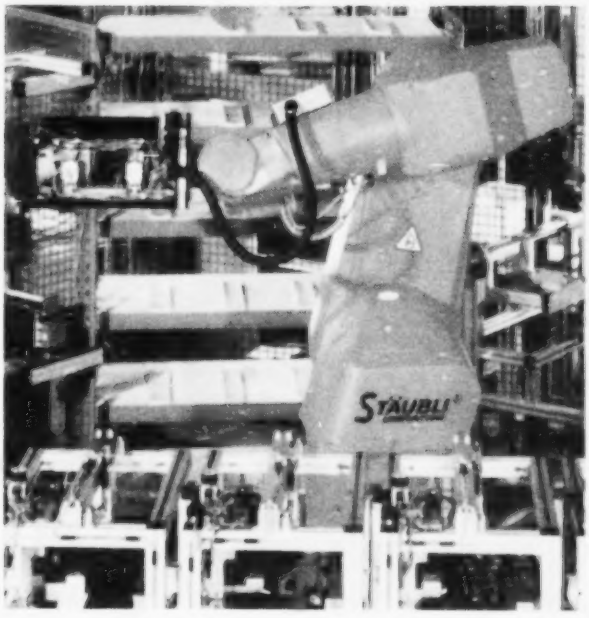
**Construction of dwellings**

| | *Poland* | | *Western Europe* |
|---|---|---|---|
| | *Annual increase* | *Per 1000 inhabitants* | *Per 1000 inhabitants* |
| 1980 | 217 090 | 6.07 | 4.3-8.1 |
| 1990 | 134 215 | 3.52 | 3.5-6.6 |
| 1994 | 76 080 | 1.97 | - |
| 1996 | 59 000 | 1.50 | - |

*Sources*: Central Statistical Office, *Housing in 1996* (Warsaw, 1997). Central Statistical Office, *Statistical Yearbook 1981* (Warsaw, 1982). European Commission, *Statistics on Housing in the European Community* (Brussels, 1993).

## World Robotics 1998—Statistics, Market Analysis, Forecasts, Case Studies and Profitability of Robot Investment




According to *World Robotics 1998—Statistics, Market Analysis, Forecasts, Case Studies and Profitability of Robot Investment* just published by the UN/ECE, in cooperation with the International Federation of Robotics (IFR), there has been a record investment in industrial robots in 1977. Other conclusions are that a robust growth in industrial robot investment is forecast for North America and Europe until 2002; for Japan and other Asian countries previous forecasts are revised downwards; the number of robots per employee in industry continues to rise sharply and; in the next 10 to 15 years, dedicated service robots will be used extensively in a wide range of professional applications as well as in homes. A new substantial business area will thus be created.

The publication *World Robotics 1998—Statistics, Market Analysis, Forecasts, Case Studies and Profitability of Robot Investment* is available, quoting sales No. GV.E.98.0.25 priced at US$ 120. ❑

## Looking Ahead
## ECE Calendar

### 1999

#### January

12-15 Working Party on Pollution and Energy

19-22 Meeting of Experts on the European Provisions concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Inland Waterway (ADN)

27-29 Working Party on Gas

#### February

1-2 Meeting of Specialized Section on Standardization of Early Ware Potatoes

8-11 INLAND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

15-17 Meeting on the Management of Statistical Information Technology

22-26 Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport

25-26 Administrative Committee for the TIR Convention 1975

26 Forum on Improving Trade Finance and Investment for the Russian Timber Sector

*Editorial*

# About the Russian crisis and its consequences: responsibilities

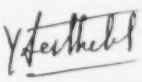
*At the beginning of 1998, contrary to the trend of general opinion, the UN/ECE argued that one had not yet suffered all the consequences of the Asian crisis and pointed out the conditions that needed to be taken to consolidate the fragile upturn in the Russian economy. The year passed with a succession of crises. During the last two months, institutions and Governments scaled down their forecasts for 1999. In the West unemployment may therefore not decrease and in Central and Eastern Europe the reforms will be more painful and perhaps slower.*

*The disparities between the countries of the ECE region, which are closely linked to the initial economic conditions and the rhythm of reforms, will continue to widen, increasing the risks of division between one Europe which is progressively integrating with the European Union and another which has the impression of having been left behind.*

*Nevertheless, at the beginning of 1999 there are reasons for hope.*

*In the face of the crises, one reason for hope in a number of countries undergoing profound reforms is the emergence of doubt vis-a-vis the prevailing wisdom of the previous 10 years. There is a rediscovery of the role of the State, the value of institutions and of rules which are firmly applied. There is also a recognition of the importance of the timely sequencing of institutional reforms, privatizations and liberalizations. In short, one rediscovers what ECE had already written about the countries in transition in the Economic Survey of Europe in 1989.*

*Another reason to hope that the divisions in Europe will not lead to serious tensions is the continuing dialogue taking place within three pan-European institutions, namely, the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the UN/ECE, where complementary and concrete endeavours are being undertaken. May these institutions be fully used.*



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*ECE Highlights* provides a round-up of news and information on major ECE events and publications and is available free of charge from the Information Officer.

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